

February 17, 2015

Committee on Aging

Re: Proposed Bill No. 716 – An Act Expanding Eligibility for the Alzheimer's Disease Respite Program.

Good morning Chairmen and members of the Aging Committee. My name is Mary Tibbals, I am a policy practice intern at the Alzheimer's Association, and graduate student at the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work.

I am here today in support of Proposed Bill No. 716 - An Act Expanding the Eligibility for the Alzheimer's Disease Respite Program.

Alzheimer's is the 6th leading cause of death in the U.S. and the only cause in the top 10 without a way to prevent, cure, or slow its progression. In addition, every 67 seconds, someone in America develops Alzheimer's disease and by 2050 someone will develop Alzheimer's every 33 seconds.

The impact of this disease is real and personal and no one is safe from its long reach. According to statistics, if we were to forecast 35 years into the future from this date and time, with the completion of my testimony, this non-discriminating disease will have touched almost every member on this committee.

My initial involvement with the association began as a volunteer in 2012 and I was immediately struck by the courage and dignity of the person with the disease and the dedication and honor of their caregivers. In the course of providing support programs and services, educational resources, and attending public awareness and advocacy events, I have been profoundly impressed by the many stories of hardship experienced by caregivers.

The heartwarming stories of strength, compassion and love provided by caregivers inspire me every day.

In contrast, their stories of financial hardship caused by the demands of providing care, while trying to maintain their own employment, emotional and physical health and well-being are harrowing.

Caregivers often share their concerns of having to reduce their work hours or quit their jobs due to their caregiving responsibilities, increasing costs of care services or unaffordable copayments, which all negatively impact their ability to provide for their own necessities and well-being. Additionally, some caregivers state that sleep deprivation caused by 24 hour care can heighten physical and emotional symptoms that aggravate already present medical issues.

- Nearly 60 % of Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers rate the emotional stress of caregiving as high or very high;
- And more than one-third report symptoms of depression.

In Connecticut, an estimated 72,000 individuals are currently living with this disease. In 2013, 176,000 caregivers provided a total of 200 million hours of unpaid care resulting in 134 million dollars in higher health costs for caregivers.

The Alzheimer's Disease respite care program provides a short period of time and relief from the 24/7 demands of caregiving. This break allows caregivers to focus on their physical and emotional needs and

restores their strength so they can continue with their important caregiving responsibilities so Alzheimer's patients can remain at home longer with loved ones and delay expensive nursing home admissions.

This proposed bill would expand eligibility for those with incomes of \$43,198 to those with incomes up to \$50,000, which would increase the number of persons eligible by 15%. Due to the projected increase in prevalence and demands for assistance, an expansion of eligibility to the Alzheimer's disease respite program would not only benefit greater numbers of persons with the disease, it also benefits their caregiver.

This important secondary benefit can reduce the risk of institutionalizing Alzheimer's patients because the improved health of caregivers should increase their effectiveness. By providing caregivers with time to attend to their own physical and emotional needs, better health outcomes can be achieved and costly healthcare expenses can be avoided.

In closing, I stress the proposed increase in the number of Alzheimer's patients included in the expansion of the Alzheimer's disease respite program will improve the emotional, physical and financial well-being of caregivers at no additional cost.

Thank you for your time.

(Information included in this testimony was obtained from the 2014 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report at www.alz.org/facts.)